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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

DURING

THE MIDDLE AGES.

In Address

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE SESSION

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BY

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I INVITE you, Gentlemen of Manchester New College, to enter this Session upon the study of the History of the Church of England during the Middle Ages, in connection with the wider survey of the development and influence of Christianity in Western Europe. It can hardly be necessary for me to vindicate to you the importance of this inquiry. But it must be confessed that at a time when the deepest problems of religion and morals are discussed with a zeal hitherto unparalleled, if not always according to knowledge, the historian has frequently to encounter impatience as he describes the vanished forms of faith and worship, on which the belief or the unbelief of to-day has turned its back. It is not a little strange that the primitive interpretations of nature and the earliest usages of ritual should be scrutinised with a care which is denied to some of the supreme products of human thought and reverence. The ground and justification of our hopes are often examined in their lowest rather than their highest expression; the collection and comparison of the traditions of savages excites more interest than the investigation of the Gospel records; and systems of doctrine which have moulded the life and character of nations are deemed unworthy of the attention.

of the philosopher who is eager to trace the genesis of belief from the days of cave dwellings and flint implements. And even among those to whom the Bible remains the great book of religion, and for whom the New Testament relates the creation of a new ideal of life, there is a certain weariness of the story which is founded on it. Through what barren deserts must the inquirer travel! How many monuments must he pass of misspent devotion! The way is darkened with the shadows of unhallowed passion, fouled with the stains of blood, strewn with the wrecks of wasted lives. The history of the world has been grimly described as the 'martyrdom of man;' the champion of free thought in matters of religion, emerging from the influences of ancient creeds or of a living hierarchy, is tempted to proclaim the history of the Church as the martyrdom of mind. 'Of what use,' he cries, 'are all these prodigious volumes of divinity? Oh that Arius and Athanasius had never met, that Augustine had kept to his rhetoric, that Aquinas had remained a 'dumb ox,' away with *Summae* and treatises on *Dogmatik*; away with all apologies for Christianity or the Church, and let the New Testament suffice!'

I shall not attempt to answer the objections which meet us from so many quarters. Of some of them we need take no heed. You, Gentlemen, have entered on the preparation for the ministry of religion, and the inquiry into the origin and primitive forms of religion will not, therefore, be indifferent to you; nay, it will be my duty, hereafter, to offer you guidance through them. But your ministry will be exercised in the presence of other Churches. You will be called upon to justify the place you fill. You will have to take account of divergent views of the grounds and nature of belief; you will be surrounded by the representatives of conflicting theories of ecclesiastical government; you will

be required to vindicate your acceptance or rejection of the creeds which will be offered to you ; and a reasoned choice will be impossible unless you are acquainted with the history of the organisation of Christianity, as well as familiar with its first sweetness and power, and gladly responsive to its call in the secret witness of your own hearts. I say nothing now of the insight into life, and the stimulating contact with great minds, which this study must convey to you. The period which I this day commend to your attention has for many reasons peculiar interest for us. The Church of England takes the lead among the institutions of religion in this country ; but it exhibits at every point the marks of an antiquity far greater than that of the Acts of Parliament on which its existence depends. Its liturgical services repeat the words of an older devotion than the piety of the sixteenth century. Its parish churches have many of them witnessed a ritual far more elaborate than that permitted under Edward VI. Its cathedrals were the products, not of an age of ecclesiastical corruption, or of royal revolt against a foreign supremacy, but of a time when faith wrought itself into the perfect round of Canterbury or Durham, and the arches of Westminster and the spire of Salisbury bore men's aspirations up to heaven. Its discipline was framed on models older still, and its episcopate professes to maintain an unbroken succession from Apostles, and carries its sacraments back to Jesús himself. By this Church you will be hereafter confronted. You cannot escape the necessity of reckoning with it in one way or another. It claims to be in some special and peculiar sense the Church of Christ ; and there are those within it who will make no terms with schismatics, and will not treat with them except on unconditional surrender. It claims to be, as it once was, the Church of the nation ; and there

are those within it who, seeing that it is now far from fulfilling either this pretension or the other, desire to restore it to its former dignity, and draw within its pale as many phases as possible of Christian faith and life. We are perhaps inclined to resist these claims; we have no sympathy with this desire. But have we ever fairly interpreted them? Driven into isolation in order to maintain the integrity of worship, have we honestly sought to understand, without arrogance or contempt, the nature of the offence of those who rend the mystic body of Christ? Can we realise what is the full significance of the ardent aspiration for the reunion of sects and parties in one actual religious organisation, stronger than the frail tie of some vague spiritual fellowship? We do not share the passionate longing after a rich corporate life, because we have never enjoyed it. But if we would be just to the aims of those who are bent on preserving it intact, if we would appreciate the sacrifices of those who voluntarily relinquish it, if we would be generous to those who cannot bear to sever themselves from it, we must at least strive to comprehend what it means. Now the Church of England in the Middle Ages really possessed such a life. It was then, as it has never been since, the inspirer and guide of the intellectual, the moral, the spiritual energy of the nation. And the history of the Church of England during the Middle Ages seeks to unfold this. It endeavours to exhibit the sources and trace the forms of its vitality, and mark their effect upon the development of the people. It is little of a theological history. The echoes of strife are sometimes heard from afar, but its anger and vehemence die away beyond the sea. Great names, indeed, are inseparably connected with it; but the soteriology of Anselm awakened no suspicion against the new modes of thought which it first formulated, and Wiclif

stands before us, Bible in hand—his great gift to the people—prepared, as the incisive critic of ecclesiastical abuses, to wrestle with pope or friar, or to convert the consecrated host back into bread, but not, as the philosophic theologian, to lay a fresh basis of belief. The record is stained, it is true, with persecution, yet the story of Lollardry is easy reading beside the struggles of Arian and Trinitarian factions, or Albigensian and Hussite wars. Christianity appears in England in the Middle Ages, not so much in the form of a doctrinal system, though its creed was elaborately defined; nor even as a scheme of ecclesiastical rule, though its administration was complex and rigid, and its discipline left nothing out of its reach; but as a social force of the noblest kind, fostering thought, elevating character, aiming at nothing less than the co-ordination of all the highest powers of man in the service of God. And so the history of the Christian Church, that is, of the organization of Christianity, in England during the Middle Ages, is to a large extent the history of England's polity and culture, as well as of its faith. It is rich in heroic episodes of great endeavour and of noble achievements; it glows with the enthusiasm of learning and devotion, or again, is dim with the tears of pity or of penitence. It has its periods of sloth, its culmination of zeal, its seasons of barrenness or of decay; but never in its worst days could its austere critics—nay, even its bitterest foes—have said of Canterbury or London what Petrarch or Savonarola said of Avignon and Rome. To the history of this Church, then, we are to address ourselves.

But what, after all, is the Church whose growth and influence we are to trace? Is it the Church as it appears in our Statute-book, whose efforts to grasp supreme power must be baffled, if they could not be subdued, whose minis-

ters refused the jurisdiction of their countrymen and owned allegiance to a distant head, 'Pope Holy,' better called 'Hypocrite;' whose functionaries were often foreigners, unable to speak the language of the people whom they professed to serve, or squandering in Italian luxury the revenues of benefices which they never visited England even to see? Is it the Church against which were directed the great Statutes of Provisors and Præmunire, or is it even that which they were intended to secure? whose riches excited the jealousy of kings, whose bishops sometimes waded to their sees through simony and corruption, whose priests were too often ignorant and unchaste? Or is it the Church as it appears in its highest aims of righteousness, the abode of the Spirit whose fruits are love, joy, peace? Is it the Church which wrote its devotion in hymn and prayer re-echoing to this day, which poured forth the passion of its aspiration in the lives of its saints, which built the cathedrals in the might of creative gladness, which reared side by side the altar and the school, and found the true objects of its wealth and toil in the suffering, the out-cast, and the poor? Which of these is the true Church? It is a conception which may be approached from many sides, and it makes some difference in our judgment which point of view we choose. Are we to regard it as a political agency, striving for universal supremacy in affairs, or only as a moral and religious organisation for the salvation of souls? Is it the Church as Augustine discerned it, spiritually one through the ages, or as Gregory VII. and Innocent III. asserted it, one in authority throughout Europe? The two conceptions existed side by side; nay, the one grew in a certain sense out of the other; and the religion of the Middle Ages cannot be understood without some understanding of their mutual relation. On a theme so

vast but a few imperfect hints can be offered : I shall speak of it only as it affected our own country ; and may attempt nothing more than to open the way for a fuller inquiry into the phases of Mediæval Christianity in England.

For those who, like ourselves, have been taught to strive after independence, if not positive originality of thought, and to appeal to the simplicity and directness of spiritual experience, it is somewhat hard to appreciate the profound conviction, handed on to the Middle Ages from the preceding centuries, that without the Church there could be no religion ; and that without religion to infuse and sustain the impulses of righteousness, morality would be torn to pieces amid the mighty forces of brutality and lust which society was only gradually controlling. But the doctrine framed during the struggle of Christianity with heathenism, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, possessed a deep inner meaning quite distinct from a sacerdotal pretension, and was carried on into changed conditions with abiding vitality. The Church gradually conquered the faiths and religions of antiquity, and offered itself as the minister of new life to men. During the early ages, when the contest was for very existence, it was inevitable that it should appear to the believer the sole way of righteousness. Augustine turned from dishonoured temples and disbanded priesthoods to look out upon the mighty plan which history revealed to be in very truth divine. He beheld the far-off promises made to patriarchs, the visions dimly unfolded to prophets, now realized on a scale far grander than their first interpreters ever dreamed ; and he felt justified in appealing to the logic of events in proof of the Heaven-appointed authority of the new claims. The struggles and sufferings which had led to so splendid a triumph were all part of the credentials of Christianity, which could have no other existence

outside of the institutions created and developed for the expression of its life, the accomplishment of its great purposes. When its organisation grew, and it gathered in East and West with its irresistible might, it was still less possible to separate religion from the visible order which upheld it. No one could dream of quitting it, for it was everywhere; no one could dream of overthrowing it, for it had just conquered the most potent forces known. It gained wealth and power, it sought to regulate every department of life, but it did not begin with these. First of all, says the Apostle, 'that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual.' But the rule, in this case, was reversed. Riches and honour, influence and authority, the rewards of the natural man, accumulated round it as a spiritual corporation. For the visible Church, at any given moment, was only the representative of that vaster congregation which had been since the world began. The array of its priests, the multitude of believers from peasant to prince, who followed the consecrated host on Corpus Christi day, to do honour to the Lord's body broken for them, these were as nothing compared with the hosts who had gone before, and should come after, the members of the mystic body of Christ. The Church of England was not the Church of a special Primate or a special Sovereign, the Catholic Church was not the Church of the reigning Pope. It had an eternal significance, to which the individuals composing its hierarchy contributed but little. It was the actual exponent in time of the divine world-plan conceived in the abysses of the changelessness of God. Its establishment had not waited till the charge of Jesus to Peter. As the real *Civitas Dei*, it carried back its origin to the first created beings; it was instituted when the angels sprang forth at the sublime words 'Let there be light,' and

began the song of joy and wonder of which they could never tire. On earth or in heaven, it mattered not, it was still the same; all faithful spirits belonged to it, in whatever sphere; it was one in time and space, the conditions of all derived existence. But as the ages came, and the generations passed away, there arose yet a third branch. The souls of the departed, where were they? The martyrs and saints who had won heaven by their sufferings and their prayers, were admitted at once to the presence of their Lord; but common men, the unnumbered ranks of those who had lived and died in the true fold, obedient to its laws, consoled by its sacraments,—these were undergoing the needful purification, ere they could bear the gaze of ineffable holiness. And so the Church came to be regarded as three-fold. It was engaged in the warfare with sin upon earth; its members were under vows of allegiance to the great Captain of their salvation; this was the *ecclesia militans*. In heaven, it was at peace with itself, ardent and joyous in the fulfilment of the divine will; this was the *ecclesia triumphans*. In purgatory, it was patiently awaiting the hour of deliverance; this was the *ecclesia exspectans*. At every moment, therefore, the believer was surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. Devotion assumed a sort of corporate character. Only in the rarest moments of supreme communion was the soul left alone with God. Bernard even intimates in his profound little treatise on the love of God, that it would not be well for the spirit to remain for more than a brief season in that august fellowship, lest he should forget those that are about him here. It was a favourite remark that the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples began with *Pater noster*, so that the suppliant should never dissociate himself from the faithful amid whom he prayed, even though it might be in solitude. The English

devotional literature of the Middle Ages reiterates this with touching insistence. Both the living and the dead should be had in everlasting remembrance. When the canon of the mass began, the worshipper was directed to give thanks for all good gifts of nature and grace, to ask pardon for past sins and strength for the future, and then to offer the intercessory prayer :

‘ Lord, thenk on tho state of holy kirk,
 And tho bishops, prestes and clerkes,
 That thai be keped in alle gode werkes,
 Tho kyng, tho quene, tho lordes of tho lande,
 That thai be wele mayntenande
 Hore states in alle godnesse,
 And reule tho folke in rightwisnesse ;
 Oure sibmen and oure wele-willandes,
 Our frendes, tenandes, and seruandes,
 Olde men, childer, & alle wymmen,
 Marchandes, men of craft, & tilmen,
 Riche men, & pore, grete & smalle,
 I pray the, Lord, for hom alle,
 That thai be keped specialy
 In gode hele & lyue haly.
 To hom that are in ille lyue,
 In sleaunder, myscounforth, or in stryue,
 Seke or prisonde, or o-pon tho see,
 Pore, exilde, desertit, if ther be,
 Til alle hom, thou sende socoure,
 To thi worship and thin honoure’.*

As the service proceeded, and the holy sacrifice was consecrated and offered, the mention of the faithful departed followed. The sacrifice of the mass had been interpreted by Augustine, of the mystic, not the real, body of Christ. Now this mystic body was no other than the Church, and the sacrifice of the mass was the symbol of the perpetual act of the Church in presenting itself a living sacrifice

* *Lay Folks Mass Book*, edited by Rev. T. F. Simmons, Early English Text Society. London, 1879, p. 32.

before God. In this solemn offering the dead and living could not be separated, for they were fellow-citizens in the same spiritual city; death made no division in their privileges and hopes, except to bring them nearer to the goal of all desire. So the whole universe was the home of the Church, and at any point in it the believer lay within the compass of heaven's protection, and beneath the charge of the ministers attendant on its bidding. As the hour of departure drew near, the solemn *Subvenite* entreated the favouring aid of the celestial watchers, 'Come to his help, ye servants of God; meet him, all ye angels of the Lord, taking his soul and bearing it into the presence of the Most High.' When the last moment was at hand, the struggling spirit was sent forth into the august company of the hosts of the *ecclesia triumphans*:

'Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, in the name of the Father Almighty who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ his Son, who suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Spirit who was shed into thee; in the name of angels and arch-angels; in the name of thrones and dominions; in the name of principalities and powers, and all heavenly virtues; in the name of cherubim and seraphim; in the name of patriarchs and prophets; in the name of apostles and martyrs; in the name of confessors and bishops; in the name of priests and levites, and all ranks of the Catholic Church; in the name of monks and anchorites; in the name of all faithful widows,—this day be thy abode in peace, and thy dwelling in the heavenly kingdom.'*

Who would not think a soul precious that was thus committed to the care of the whole world's holiness? Who would deny its dignity when the countless eyes of the heavenly hosts were looking down upon its agonies, and waiting to welcome its release? The whole of life, then, was encompassed by spiritual forces infinitely higher than

* *Sarum Manual*, ed. 1490.

itself, all working to one end, beneath the supreme control of the great world-plan of God. In seasons of intense devotion these lower forms of the manifestation of righteousness were lost in the excess of light revealed in the unchanging ground of holiness and love from whence they sprang, and the soul and God were left alone. But for the ordinary believer, praying in his accustomed place in his parish church, there rose over the incense-clouds shrouding the priest at the altar, there shone through the gleaming lights of the windows, a mighty company of the unseen, filling the way to heaven, ready to give their suffering for his gain, out of their peace to aid him in his peril. They belonged to all times, they came from all lands, though they spoke but one language, that of thanksgiving, pity, aspiration, trust. Among these he felt a strange familiarity; to their guidance he yielded himself without reserve; their aid he invoked for those most dear to him, and for the sorrowing and helpless everywhere; moreover, with them lay the testimonies of truth, for they had suffered and had overcome. What he believed, had been learned by them through the sword and the cross; the martyrs had written in their blood the articles of his creed. And so faith and endeavour were not of himself alone, nor of the far-off God beyond all space and time; they were of the Church, which, through all ages, among angels, spirits, men, remained the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

A Church which thus existed everywhere and always, besides its visible manifestation at any given era and in any given place, necessarily felt itself one; and this character of unity controlling diversity shaped to a large extent its action and its thought. Upon these as its primal ideas its organisation was founded: the sacraments, the hierarchy, were everywhere identical. No sooner, however, were

these introduced to a sundered people, to divided realms, than the way to union seemed to be unfolded, and the nation first knew that it was one, within the walls of the Church. From the days when Augustine's followers carried the cross through the land, it brought in among the petty kingdoms of England a power capable of transcending their local limits, their disputes and wars. The administration of the Greek Theodore (a citizen, like Paul, of no mean city) completed what his Latin predecessor had begun. The synod convoked by him at Hertford in the year 673 gathered together representatives from the rival kingdoms of Kent and Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia, and Deira. It was the first national council for national legislation. The earliest laws, such as those of Ina and Wihtred, exhibit the influence which the Church soon began to exert on the community; and the bishops having once taken their places in the Witan, passed in the natural course of things into Parliament. That the Church engrossed for so long the highest offices of law and statesmanship, and provided chancellors and ambassadors for centuries, was the inevitable consequence of its ability to find the best men, and secure for them the noblest training. Its universality rendered it of necessity democratic by intrinsic character and constitution, however aristocratic might be its system; and it was open to the son of one carpenter to sit in the chair of St. Peter as the vicar of another of the same craft. It took its stand, therefore, in its best days, as the supporter of popular rights, and helped to wrest concession after concession from the grasp of the Crown; and if it did not always check oppression—nay, did not always try—yet within its walls, at least, baron and burgess, landowner and labourer, hushed the struggle of rights, that they might utter the same confessions and receive the same absolution.

The English Church, however, was something more than the national organisation of religion. Co-extensive with the realm, it did its part to harmonise and blend the social forces within it; but it could not forget that it belonged to a dominion wider still. The claims of the mediæval popes to be the 'Bishop of bishops,' the 'Ordinary of ordinaries,' were only the logical result of pretensions slowly raised, but by degrees securely established. They created innumerable difficulties, they thrust upon the hierarchy incompatible duties, they begot grievances which affected not the laity alone; but they were not at first wholly evil, though the corruption of the Roman Court subsequently rendered them intolerable. When Gregory VII. required William the Conqueror to own himself his 'man,' the demand was scornfully refused; but in guaranteeing to the Church a jurisdiction of its own, he made a concession nearly as far-reaching. The exemption of the clergy from civil law introduced into the realm a foreign authority which was not slow to take advantage of the charter of its liberties; and if its power was grossly abused, if it asserted the right and continually exercised the privilege of controlling the appointments to sees and presentations to benefices in order to provide for its own favourites, if it taxed the clergy for selfish purposes of aggrandisement and absorbed a vast portion of the wealth of the country for wicked wars and shameful lusts, there was, nevertheless, a side to this connection with a tribunal beyond the seas fraught with the greatest gain. The Roman mission, and the real establishment in this country of the spiritual power of the Church, drew England into the main stream of European development. Its chroniclers, indeed, sought to set it at a still earlier period within the sacred circle, and in the Glastonbury legends provided it with a Christianity of apostolic

times, derived from Joseph of Arimathea. But the faint traces of the early British Church may be left behind; never, as an independent organisation, could it have played the part which Rome enabled its successor to achieve. By the new movement, England was released from its isolation; it was not shut up in its own seas; it could share in the larger life beyond. No sooner is the Church really planted than the Canterbury School is founded with it, and Latin and Greek, arithmetic and astronomy, reveal to the Kentish men new worlds of thought. Pilgrims to Rome return laden with books; and from the seclusion of his cell at Jarrow, Bede calmly surveys the universe, and records the results of observation and speculation in those works whose cyclopædic character made them a standard of learning and an epitome of wisdom for so many centuries at home and abroad. So England can give as well as receive, and Alcuin passes to the court at Aix to superintend the organisation of education in the dominions of the great Charles. From that time onward it will be found that the richness and vigour of England's social, intellectual, and moral life, depend largely on the connection with wider interests secured to it through the Church. It rises with their variety and force, it sinks with their contraction and decline. See how profound is the stimulus given to it, though in different ways, first by Lanfranc and then by Anselm. Watch the results, so unforeseen, of the departure of the young Bernard, whom the English Stephen Harding, abbot of Citeaux, sends forth with a little band of companions into the wilderness. What new power of devotion, what fresh earnestness of sacrifice, were carried into the waste places of our land by the Cistercians; what depths of misery and suffering in the towns were lightened a little later by the arrival of the homeless and tender followers of Saint Francis of Assisi!

The Church of England alone and unaided could never have created an Oxford with thirty thousand students,* nor even with three,—if you like, with some critics, to divide the number by ten,†—or secured for its sons the chairs of learning among the great teachers of France and Italy. But it spoke in its lecture-rooms the language of united Christendom. The possession of knowledge, the ability of speculation, proved a passport everywhere; no country feared the philosophy or dreaded the science of another;‡ and no sooner is the name of Aristotle heard echoing in Latin versions at many removes through Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac, from the original Greek text, than it flies from university to university, and the new learning soon establishes the position of the master beyond all power of assault. And if, in the fifteenth century, a certain langour crept over the energy which had a little while before been so strenuous and so varied, it was still through the union of England with the Continent that fresh stimulus was to come. The Council of Constance was an ecclesiastical failure, and committed gross crimes against humanity; but its splendid assemblage drew English theologians once more into the European concourse. Thence, too, came Poggio Bracciolini hither in 1420, in the interest of the classical studies now reviving, to gather manuscripts for Italy. Stray teachers found their way across the Alps to our own universities; by-and-by Linacre and Grocyn set forth to master the Greek scholarship of Florence and Rome; by the end of the century Oxford provides a home for the travelled

* The number claimed by Richard of Armagh in the fourteenth century.

† Mr. Anstey, *Munimenta Academica*, Vol. I. p. xlvi, proposes only to divide by five.

‡ Compare the English ignorance of German philosophy during the first half of this century.

Colet; Erasmus becomes its guest, and the Reformation is at hand.

It was the existence of the Church as a mighty spiritual corporation spread through all lands which rendered all this possible. The activity of thought was generated within it, if not always by it, and without it could have been neither so intense nor so wide-spread. Is it too much to say that the character of thought received from the same source a peculiar and significant impress? It is frequently supposed that the Middle Ages were a period of blind, unreasoning credulity. Its chronicles are filled with portents; the lives of its saints seem little else than a series of childish miracles; its worship is often described as one mass of superstition; nay, the very pretensions of the Church itself, its wonders of grace, its mysteries of the mass, could only be accepted, it is urged, when the penetration of reason had been laid to rest. There is, however, another side to this. An intense sense of spiritual things under given phases of intellectual development must, of necessity, express itself in the belief in miracles; and in a universe which was supposed to be directly dependent on the divine will, first of all for its creation and then for its administration, no marvels of Heaven's power could be out of place. But in interpreting the scene of things before them, the noblest minds never lost sight of the unity of thought in the external world, corresponding in a certain sense to the unity of the divine plan within the Church. If the Spirit dwelt within the one, the other was the manifestation of the Word. As the product of the divine reason, the world was essentially a whole; its parts, its forces, were all related to each other; nothing was self-dependent; through an infinite series of connections one creative design bound everything together. And this was true not only of the sequences of

physical phenomena, but of the events of the great drama of history. It was true even of the divine events of the incarnation and the death of Christ. The limitations of our nature might, indeed, prevent men from fully apprehending the intellectual grounds determining the form and the order which these events assumed; for a time men might be compelled to accept them as the faith of the Church; but the maxim of Augustine was deeply impressed upon its highest teaching, *Tempore auctoritas, re autem ratio prior est*. The theology of the Middle Ages was, in fact, an endeavour to trace out the applications of this principle. It is associated in our minds with vain discussions, with endless divisions which do not divide, and we are ready to dismiss it with a little contemptuous pity into the limbo of good intentions and wasted ingenuity. I am not concerned to defend the whole of the scholastic philosophy. But its theology proper cannot be thus lightly put aside. It is an attempt to construct from the data of rational, moral and spiritual experience, a system of thought and life, embracing the whole relations of the world to God. Let any one read the brief treatise of Anselm, 'Cur Deus Homo,' which endeavours, on the grounds of pure reason dealing with the facts of human nature, to establish the necessity of the Incarnation, and he will find that he is confronted, not with the pale phantoms of abstract ideas, but with a passionate sense of the contrast between man's sinfulness and God's holiness, which has thrilled through Christendom for ever since. The structure of doctrine raised upon this may have been overthrown; but it was at least an edifice not blindly built. Its architect looked out upon the world's guilt from the days of the first man; he placed it in the view of infinite righteousness, and he sought for the reconciliation of the two. This longing for

unity, harmony, and order, is everywhere visible, and was not satisfied till it had brought theology into relation with all knowledge. Even the early writers were dimly animated by it, and it embodied itself in the encyclopædic culture which aimed at traversing all departments of nature and history. Arithmetic and geometry, the movements of the heavenly bodies, the variations of wind and tide, geography and chronology, dealing with the outward world, grammar and logic dealing with the instrument and the method of thought, these and many other studies came within the view of the teacher who knew that behind them all lay a continuity of design which was never broken, inasmuch as it was divine. One view of this even admitted of easy presentment to the popular imagination. The great series of Mysteries, performed at the Church festivals, exhibited a long succession of events in the world's history; nay, it did not shrink from displaying the unity of the plan of Heaven for human destiny, from the Creation to the Judgment. Day by day, patriarch and lawgiver, king and prophet, passed one after the other across the stage, carrying on the scheme from Eden to Ararat, from Ararat to Sinai, from Sinai to Jerusalem, and so prepared the way for that august Council of the Trinity when the arrangements for human redemption were finally decreed. Told in this light, the story of the Man of Nazareth was fraught with the highest significance for all time, and took its place as the central point of all human affairs, to which everything had looked forward, and from which everything was since derived. The same thought found expression in the popular legends of the Cross, which set forth how the tree at once of doom and of salvation sprang from kernels of the fruit of that other fatal tree of Paradise, placed in the mouth of the dead Adam; it grew and lasted with a won-

drous life age after age, till the Redeemer needed its beam whereon to fulfil his sacrifice. Under the inspiration of these sentiments history must needs become universal. So the chroniclers begin with the beginning of the world; side by side with the great names of the Bible they place the ancient monarchies as they rose and fell; and they never stop till the pen has written the events of yesterday, and there is no more to record. And philosophy cannot be less comprehensive. There are few figures more striking in the annals of the English Church than that of Roger Bacon, the Franciscan Friar, toiling on through poverty and discouragement to elaborate his views on the co-ordination and development of the different branches of knowledge. When support failed him at home, the interest exhibited by the Pope still sustained him in his extraordinary labours. He saw that the sciences suffered through separation and detachment; he wished, therefore, to bring them together by exhibiting their mutual connections, establishing their independence, and arranging them in a series, of which each member should rest upon that which preceded it. He saw, moreover, that the pursuit of knowledge was impaired by the use of false methods, and hampered by worthless traditions. From these it was his object to set it free; and the main stress of his attack was directed against the forces of custom and undue reliance upon authority. And so he proceeded step by step from grammar and logic as the preliminaries of correct expression and accurate thought, through mathematics and physics, towards metaphysics and morals. Nor did his labours cease there. With unfaltering devotion to his great end, he produced at the age of well-nigh eighty years his '*Compendium Theologiæ*,' and then he disappears into the darkness and is seen no more. In theology, indeed, that method of experiment on which he had insisted as

the great instrument of progress in physical science, was unavailable. But the great study must be pursued in a kindred spirit. He found it beset with 'horse-loads' of tractates filled with scholastic 'questions;' he desired to lead men back to the supreme record of all religious experience, the source of all Christian truth, in the Scriptures. The inquirer here must lay aside his philosophy and begin with the facts; these could only be discovered through a knowledge of the languages in which they were originally narrated; and the first duty, therefore, was the study of Hebrew and Greek to ascertain what the sacred text really means.* It is but one step further to the complete trust in the unity of truth which leads to the principle of free inquiry; and the fifteenth century presents us with the curious combination, in the person of Reginald Pecock, of a rationalist bishop defending the practices of the Roman Church against the Lollards or Bible-men. It is one of the objects of the 'Repressor of Over-much Blaming of the Clergy,'—the first great theological treatise in the English language,—to weaken the appeal of Wiclif's followers to Scripture, and to find in reason a final and controlling authority. The moral law, he argued, was plainly not founded on the Old and New Testaments, but on the book of the law of nature written with the finger of God upon men's souls. Its commands were, in fact, all assumed by Christ and his apostles, who exhort all men to follow them, and never speak of them as though they were aught that they themselves had made. The mention of moral truth, therefore, in Scripture does not prove Scripture to be the

* See the discussion of the seven faults in contemporary studies of theology, in the 'Opus Minus,' *Baconis Opera Inedita*, Brewer (Rolls Ser.), and especially the fifth, arising out of errors in the Vulgate, p. 330.

ground of it, any more than Christ's allusions to the laws of the weather prove that Scripture is the ground of natural philosophy. The corollary is inevitable.

"Whanne euere and where euere in Holi Scripture or out of Holi Scripture be writen eny point or eny gouernaunce of the seide lawe of kinde [nature], it is more verrili writen in the book of mannis soule than in the outward book of parchemyn or of velym; and if eny semyng discorde be bitwixe the wordis writen in the outward book of Holi Scripture and the doom of resoun, write in mannis soule and herte, the wordis so writen without-forth oughten be expowned and be interpretid and brought for to accorde with the doom of resoun in thilk mater: and the doom of resoun oughte not forto be expowned, glosid, interpretid, and broughte for to accorde with the seid outward writing in Holi Scripture of the Bible or oughtwhere ellis out of the Bible."*

The judgments of reason may, indeed, vary; they may be misled and deceived; but our author adds,

"Bi cause that God hath given to us noon other power of resonynge than which may faile and erre, he wole holde us excusid though we folewe an erroneouse doom of resoun, whilis we ben not negligent but diligent bothe in our owne avising and bi counseil taking of othere forto haue a right doom in oure resoun."†

This view of the attainment of truth by slow investigation and careful thought, necessarily led to a plea for free discussion.

"Certis withoute argument can no trouthe be knowe neither leerned in the intellect of man, and that whether thilk trouthe be of lawe of kinde or of feith, except thilk treuthis in lawe of kinde which ben openest of alle othere treuthis, and han noon opener treuthis than thei ben bi whiche thei mowe be proued. . . . And ferthermore, the more eny treute, whether he be of feith or of no feith, be brought in to examinacioun of arguyng, the more trewe and the more cleerli trewe he schal be seen; and if he be not trewe, but seme trewe eer he come into tryng of argumentis, the more vntrewe and the more cleerli vntrewe he schal be seen.

* *Repressor*, Vol. I. p. 25.

† *Ib.* p. 75.

. . And therefore Goddis forbode that any Cristen man schulde thinke and trowe to be a trewe and a good gouernance forto kepe hise feithis and his othere opiniouns priuey, and lete hem not come into what euer examynacioun of argumentis whiche mowe be mad ther upon ; namelich whanne and where the holder of tho feithis and of hise othere opinions mai be sikir forto come and go and speke and argue and answeere withoute eny bodilli harne, and with out eny losse of his riches or of his fame.**

And so we are conducted by an Anglican bishop, under the sense of the all-pervading unity of truth in the mind of man, in nature, and the word and will of God, from the heart of mediæval Catholicism to the basis of our theological studies at this very hour.

Once more, the same conception of the Church as a vast spiritual corporation helped to shape the lines of its moral ideals. Nowhere do we meet with more violent contrasts, yet nowhere do we find more distinct and ruling conceptions of holiness, than are exhibited in the literature of the religious life from the Conquest to the Reformation. Its aspirations are not vague and unformed ; they take the most definite shapes. Walter Map writes the Apocalypse of Bishop Goliath, and paints the stainless purity of Galahad in the Quest of the Grail. In the same pilgrimage to the shrine of Becket at Canterbury ride Chaucer's Poor Parson of a town and the fiery-faced Sompnour. The real Becket, the favourite of the people, whose austerities and whose wrongs secured for him during life the reputation of sanctity so triumphantly established by his death, solemnly cursed his enemies on Christmas morning three days before he fell, uttering his dreadful dooms against Robert de Broc for inciting a regent monk to cut off the tail of one of his state mules ; the ideal Becket, working miracles of forgiving love through the blood which he shed for the Church, recalls

* *Repressor*, Vol. I. pp. 97—99.

his dying foe to life and peace. But over all these contrasts, and they might be indefinitely multiplied, the Church never failed to hold up one sublime figure towards which all eyes might ever turn for help and strength; it was that of the suffering God upon the cross. The great fact of human nature on which mediæval religion was based, was its sinfulness; the great consolation was the redeeming efficacy of the death of Christ. The central idea of all devotion, therefore, was the Passion. Its force was not impaired by doctrines of predestination and election which, by emphasising the immediate connection between God and the soul, threw into the shade the historic aspects of reconciliation and atonement. On the other hand, as though the death upon the cross had not sufficed, day by day upon ten thousand altars the mystic sacrifice was renewed. Jesus had been born, indeed, only to die. The intervening events of his career faded out of sight; and his condescension in entering on our human life, and his anguish in quitting it, were the two points on which all thought and love were fixed. Towards such condescension, humility and self-abasement could be man's only attitude, and his profound reverence for the infinite holiness was further strengthened by the whole spiritual resources of the Church to which he belonged. For gradually by the side of Jesus there grew into clearness another form, that of a woman, exhibiting alike in sorrow and in joy a perfect obedience, meekness, purity. The ideal of humanity which was lost in the glow of the divine pity of the incarnate Son, re-appeared in the Virgin Mother, who fulfilled all virtue, and shone as the star over the troubled sea of life. Nor was she alone in the glory of heaven. A multitude of confessors stood around her, and among them the believer could hear, as they sang their song of praise, the tones of his countrymen

who had entered the blessed life. Above him, in circle after circle, rank after rank of holiness, were the innumerable company of the saints; the stories of their lives, read in the public services of the Church, revealed to him the achievements of piety in his own land, amid the fields and houses which he knew; they kept before him a standard of conduct nearer to his capacities than the supreme figure of the Gospels, but still loftier than his own, and never let his reverence droop, but quickened it constantly with some fresh appeal. The eye, however, was not turned for ever upward. It looked out upon the world, and there it was confronted at once with the needs of ignorance, of sorrow, and of sin. The poor and the sick, the prisoner and the desolate, belonged to that brotherhood of suffering which Jesus himself had founded; in its service the noblest gifts were not too precious, and so beside humility went helpfulness, and with reverence was mingled sacrifice. The school, the dole of food or alms, the hospital for the aged and infirm, the leper-house where the followers of St. Francis learned the hardest discipline of patience and self-forgetfulness, these were among the commonest of mediæval institutions growing out of the corporate life of the Church. But there were many more; and none perhaps more remarkable than the guilds of which such numbers were established in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I speak not of the craft guilds, but of those marked rather by a religious and social character. Founded, as their statutes repeatedly affirm, 'to cherish brotherly love,' they purposed by regular contributions, after the manner of our modern Friendly Societies, to secure provision against loss or sickness, in old age, at death.* But they did much more

* *English Gilds*, edited by the late Toulmin Smith, Early English Text Soc., London, 1870.

than this. They sought to lift up the level of daily life, and required their members to abstain from mutual wrong and evil speech. They assisted the young, they sped the pilgrim on his way, they housed the poor, they buried the dead. They even undertook larger services; they founded and maintained schools, they repaired roads, bridges, churches, city walls, and pledged themselves to a constant energy of goodwill. When the great religious orders were declining, when the temptations of wealth had proved too powerful for vows of poverty, when labour had subsided into idleness, and chastity had yielded to lust, lay life was yet healthy enough to organise itself in helpfulness, and plant its centres by the hundred through the length and breadth of the land. They grew up under the fostering care of the Church; they were dedicated to the Trinity, the Virgin Mother, the Holy Sacrament, the Cross. In spite of some traces of occasional disorder, they may be fairly said to have endeavoured to enlist the strong in aid of the weak, to support faith and diffuse sympathy. Not less—nay, indeed, far more, than regiments of dissolute friars or slothful priests, did they belong to the Church militant; and it was nothing short of a disaster to the country when they began to fall a prey to the greedy hands of Henry VIII.

The conditions of thought and life in the Middle Ages have passed away, and they can never be recalled. But it is not a little significant that we seem to be in some ways reaching from the side of science that conception of existence as a whole, whose separate parts are co-ordinated together through space and time, which the Church strove to present from the religious side. The ancient forms were grotesque and obscure; the modern are clearer and more defined. The glimpses of the Church were clouded by dimness of tradition; nature was the same, but the eyes of her

observers were veiled. The increase of knowledge is often thought to be fatal to faith : and those who regard themselves as children of light find little in the Middle Ages but darkness and superstition, whose feeble relics are fast vanishing away. But if the Middle Ages were the ages of faith, it is not because they were the ages of ignorance, though the greatest minds were unacquainted with facts now in the possession of every school-boy, nor because they were ages of priestly domination, for there have been other tyrannies as severe. But it is because they were ages when men realised that they belonged to a mighty scheme of things far transcending their own purposes, the manifestation of the Eternal Thought, embracing the whole created world in the grasp of its design. To this the holiest of all times had borne witness : in it they had gladly taken their part, though it had often been a part of ignominy and suffering : for it they had given their labour and their lives. The whole sum of existence had grown consciously richer, and the moral power of each generation was the greater for the achievements of saintliness in that which went before. Was not this the proof of a vast plan for what Augustine termed (how common is the idea now !) the education of the world ? Behind all change, therefore, the discerning mind passed to the everlasting ground of truth and righteousness, whereon it could securely rest. From the midst of the struggles of passion and violence, which civilisation has in part suppressed if it has not wholly eradicated them, the spirit of devotion gazed untroubled, undismayed, at the solemn heights of perfect being. There, it beheld a glory and a peace, wherein action and energy were so harmonious that they seemed not to perturb the divine repose. It did not doubt, it did not question ; it saw, it felt, it knew. And so its noblest hymns, its prayers, its meditations, still speak

to us in tones that have not lost their meaning ; for they are the utterance of men who had heard a voice, as it were, from the whole world's soul, delivering the testimony of unnumbered multitudes of the saints, to the abiding purposes and love of God.

